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O candidato, Ouahiba HALIM

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, sweeping horizontal stroke followed by a vertical stroke and a small flourish.

Lisboa, 12 de Outubro de 2016

Declaro que esta Dissertação se encontra em condições de ser apreciado pelo júri a designar.

O orientador,

Lisboa, 12 de Outubro de 2016

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Introduction

American society has been described as a melting pot of different peoples of multiple nationalities with various cultures coming together to form a nation. The history of America depicts a continent that was sparsely populated by the Indian tribes of America who are the original residents of the continent and whose autonomy has been jeopardized. The social dominance and identity of the different ethno-racial groups in the American society can be attributed to the time of their arrival in America and their numbers as well, giving a stronger social position to those who arrived earlier: The question of priority has been the biggest challenge to the minority groups that came to America later, and whose numbers are still low compared to other communities. Thus, they have tended to be made to feel like outsiders in a country to where their ancestors came and were buried. One minority group that has suffered the stigma of not being easily accepted in the American social fabric is the plural and diversified Arab-American community.

Struggling to make for themselves a significant place in the United States, Arab-Americans make up a community which is remarkably diverse, including the children of many generations of immigrants as well as recent newcomers; The complexity of Arab-American identity is discussed by Lisa Suhair Majaj who states that:

“At the present time, there are two main view points: the first view is that Arab-American identity is in essence a transplanted Arab identity, turning upon a preservation of Arab culture, maintenance of the Arab language, involvement in the Middle Eastern politics, and a primary relationship to the Arab world. [...]. The second view, however, is that Arab-American identity is intrinsically American and should be understood in relation to the American context and American frameworks of assimilation and multiculturalism” (Majaj,1999:26).

According to Majaj, "these perspectives are not necessarily opposed: many Arab-Americans engage in political activism on Arab issues and preserve Arab culture in their lives while also seeking integration into the American context." However, "there tends to be a discernible orientation toward one or the other side of the hyphen" (Ibid.).

As for the Arab immigration flux, several scholars such as Carol Fadda-Conrey¹, Michael Suleiman², Najib E. Saliba³, and Alixa Naff⁴ claim that Arab immigration to the United States is characteristically divided into three phases: The first one extending from 1885 to 1945, the second from 1945 to 1967, and the third from 1967 to the present. For instance, Carol Fadda-Conrey states that:

" The first wave of Arab immigrants, who consisted mainly of Lebanese Christians rejected for the most part any Arab national commitments or identifications, maintaining their cultural and social links to their home country while seeking assimilation in the US by claiming their rights to be categorized as white citizens" (Fadda-Conrey, 2006: 187).

This, however, contrasts the second and third waves of Arab immigrants who, according to Fadda-Conrey "proved to be less prone to assimilation since they were largely comprised of Muslims and Arabs who maintained strong Arab national identities" (Ibid.).

This may account for the fact that Arabs are still described in negative images that can be found in every form of popular culture in the United States including literature, art, music, fashion, cartoons, advertisements, television and films. Arab men are portrayed as being best rich oil sheiks or worst sadistic terrorists with no regard for human life. The representations of Arab women tend to include erroneous images of scantily dancers performing for a roomful of horny men, or oppressed and victimized hopeless objects of a powerful patriarchy.

In the last decades, political events such as the Palestinian Intifada, Gulf Wars I and II and the events of 9/11 have once again cast the Middle East as violent and threatening. This political context has determined the perception of Arab-Americans as a problematic ethnic group. The hostile interpretation of their positioning in mainstream American society iterated on popular culture and discourse. It drove a new generation of Arab_American scholars and writers to engage in a project that aims " to better inform a

¹ *Arabs in America: Interdisciplinary Essays on the Arab Diaspora* 2006,

² *Arabs in America: Building a New Future* , Temple University Press, 1999

³ *Emigration from Syria and the Syrian-Lebanese Community of Worcester*,
Ma(Ligonier,Pa.,1992),p.39

⁴ *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985),108

hostile American public and to educate the young generation of Arab-Americans about the culture of their parents and grandparents" (Amireh, 1996: 10). They want to make their voices heard by the whole world and to encourage a created renaissance that will give them a significant place in the United States.

To realize these objectives, major publishers, as well as small houses, started publishing a growing list of new titles, and a body of Arab-American fiction has begun to be shaped, read by a growing mainstream audience. As Judith Gabriel attests, "Arab-American authors have moved out of the shadows, giving readings in public libraries and winning awards" (Gabriel, 2001:34). In this context, Steven Salaita adds that several Arab-American literary circles, literary festivals and journals emerged; the most relevant of these being "*Al Jadid (The New)* (1995), a quarterly publication dedicated to Arab culture and arts here and abroad, and *Mizna (Drop of Rain)* (1998), a tri-yearly publication displaying Arab-American literature and visual arts (Salaita, 2000:6).

In addition, a number of anthologies, articles, novels and collections of poetry by Arab-Americans have also appeared aimed primarily at an Arab-American audience. In this way, in about one or two generations, Arab-Americans will achieve a literary renaissance of huge significance, because more opportunities for cultural and ethnic presence exist now than did in the past, enriching the American literary discourse and making it more unique and varied. In fact, "Arab-Americans are now articulating their voices with originality and confidence" (Ibid.).

This opens new perspectives to Arabs who have migrated to America and have tended to stick to their home culture; thus further alienating themselves from national community that is so diverse, a trend that affected the perception of the Arab American literature and its acceptability in society because it ropes in their cultural practices and beliefs, which are not subscribed by other communities as Wail. S. Hassan discusses. According to him, authors such as Abu-Jaber have produced novels written in a form that integrates the peculiarities of Arab literature with the mainstream American forms of writing, a welcome tendency as he argues that "there is no systematic account of the birth and development of a tradition" in contrast with the well documented history of Arab immigration to the United States (Hassan, 2008: 245).

Prominent contemporary authors include Elmaz Abinader author of *Children of the Roojme: A Family's Journey from Lebanon* (1997); a memoir which crosses three

generations of Lebanese and covers the challenges of finding a home away from their country; Joseph Geha's collection of short stories *Through and Through* published in 1990, which follows three generations of an Arab-American family as they create a new community and way of life, struggling to keep their Arab roots relevant while adapting their culture to new conditions, or Evelyn Shakir's *Bint Arab (Arab girl)* (1997). A story which offers portraits, through personal narratives, of Arab women striking the delicate balance between their own cultural traditions and the way of life and opportunities they find in the United States. To these may be added others such as Naomi Shihab Nye, Suheir Hammad who seek to challenge established cultural and racial boundaries in their articulation of Arab-American experiences and to assert their identity on their own terms. They are all ambassadors reflecting the Arab-Americans' experiences in the United States and discussing their problems.

Diana Abu-Jaber is one of the important Arab-American authors who write about the struggles of being a citizen in the United States. Born of a mixed marriage, she is a hyphenated American who addresses the insecurities of assimilating (or not) in a country that has not necessarily embraced Arab people. She tries to engage in one of the important problems facing Arab-Americans which is cultural duality – the feeling of being caught between two different cultures– in many of her literary works.

The principal aims of this research are to explore the themes of identity, gender and cultural duality in two novels of Abu-Jaber's: *Arabian Jazz* and *Crescent*, to examine how the characters' lives and experiences reflect their displacement, spiritual homelessness, and the hardships of adjustment to a new society. Caught between two different cultures, they strive to search for their real identity: whether to be an Arab or an American or how to be both. These two novels mark a new phase in Arab-American literature since they address one of the main problems confronting Arab-Americans and help as well to enlighten the readers about the Arab culture.

Like Diana Abu-Jaber, many prominent Arab-American writers have experienced the same challenges. Elmaz Abinader, for example, declares "I am not a foreigner with adventures to tell, and I am not an American, I am one of the children with a strange name, who cannot choose a culture. I must always live in-between" (Salwa Essayah, 2003:28). Etel Adnan also expresses her feelings of in-betweenness by saying:

"I got used to standing between situations, to being a bit marginal and still a native, to getting acquainted with notions of truth which were relative and changed like the hours of the day and the passing seasons'" (Takieddine, 1997: 24).

However, my choice of Abu-Jaber as a writer is dictated by many reasons: the fact that she spent different periods of her life moving between Jordan, her father's homeland, and the United States, her mother's homeland, as a writing professor at Portland University as well as her hyphenated condition which has allowed her to extensively elaborate on her "in-betweenness." Being a part of two different cultural traditions – Arab (Jordanian) and American, she has experienced the feeling of dual loyalty. Her father used to tell her that she was "absolutely" Arab, whereas her Jordanian relatives called her "the light one" and saw her as American. Diana Abu-Jaber says she "was given mixed messages" and she always realizes that it "was very confusing"(Cruel Jonathan, 2004, E1).

It is from this paradox that she draws material for her writings, which she considers wonderfully healing. Her bibliography includes works of fiction such as *Arabian Jazz* (1993), *Crescent* (2003), *Origin* (2007), *Birds Of Paradise* (2011), the cookbook-memoir: *The Language of Baklava* (2005) and *Life without a Recipe* (2016).

Her novels represent the Arab-American existence from the point of view of someone who is deeply involved in it and who sways between both sides of the "cultural hyphen." They present themes that consciously mirror issues of ethnicity and immigrant condition. In her novels *Crescent* and *Arabian Jazz*, Abu-Jaber questions issues of identities, homesickness, self-discovery, and cultural transmission. The narrative structure is interwoven with storytelling, poetry, flashbacks where memory, food and music are strongly connected. Besides that, food – the Middle Eastern food – appears as an essential indicator of the Arab American ethnicity. Like *Arabian Jazz*, *Crescent*, also introduces an original insight into the Arab-American community of Los Angeles and is considered as "a significant contribution to the ongoing dialogue of cultural differences and similarities" (Luan Gaines, 2004). The same point is claimed by Abinader, who, speaking of this second generation of Arab American writers states that:

"Today, Arab American writers are going beyond stories and poems that are linked to the homeland and heritage. Their expressions explore new vistas -- related to years spent living in the United States -- and domestic political and social issues that affect their everyday lives"(Abinader,2000:13).

Abu-Jaber also plays the role of a cultural translator or interpreter of Arabs for the non-Arab readers however unintentionally. What she wants to do is to reflect the reality of Arab-Americans' experiences in the United States and her two books are pieces of fictional writing that focus on the hardships of Arab women and men who cannot fully integrate into the American society. The present study attempts to provide a reading of Abu-Jabers' works, *Arabian Jazz* and *Crescent* as texts that reflect the concerns and aspects of a second generation of Arab-American writers, born in the US and shaped by American life, education and the Middle-Eastern attachment.

This dissertation is divided into three chapters:

The first chapter will outline the early history of Arab literature linking it with circumstances of specific waves of immigration since 1860's. It will also consider Arab American recent Literature and the transformations operated by the new generation of its writers.

Chapter Two will concentrate on Abu Jabers first novel *Arabian Jazz*. In this section, I will examine the presentation of music as a tool of cultural dialogue and discuss how Abu-Jaber represents race and gender construction by employing different strategies. Lastly, the issue of the representation of fatherhood will also be scrutinized.

Chapter Three will focus on Jaber's second novel *Crescent*. My discussion of food goes beyond the general notion of food as "just a dish to be served" and I will explore how this element is strongly related to power, gender, exile, memory and displacement.

The conclusion of the research summarizes the whole thesis and states the points of comparison and contrast between *Arabian Jazz* and *Crescent* in their presentation of cultural clashes. It will also show the importance and the contributions of Abu-Jaber and her two novels, *Arabian Jazz* and *Crescent*, in the Arab-American literatures.

Chapter I

Immigration and the emergence of Arab American literature

Introduction

America's nature as a crossroads of cultures has provided it with a rich tapestry of literary sources, many linked to different groups that eventually come to shape its artistic discourses. By so doing, different communities in the American society have turned to literature as "a way of expressing their culture and practices as well as a way of preserving them for the future generations" (Majaj, 2008:69). The effect of a multicultural society is that the cultures of its groups tend to fade with practices that are more acceptable across the board remaining firm as the only ways the society has for a common ground. Newcomers have to build their new lives in "a heavily assimilationist US context", which makes it difficult to maintain their national and cultural identity (Majaj, 2008: 63).

In Arabic multicultural society where originally strike cultures come into contact with others, changes both the older and the new, traditional social practices and artistic expressions will irritably be changed. In this context, immigrant American writers have, historically, focused their writings on what they perceived to be acceptable to both their ethnic communities and to the larger society where they have settled. As Wail Hassan stresses, "The success of literary writers in society has therefore been pegged on the perception of the society on the community of the specific writer and its attitude towards the style of writing the writer will adapt" (Hassan,2002: 9) because the levels of tolerance for different communities' practices differ. In most instances, these practices are informed by culture. Strong and rigid cultures have been known to attract resentment due to their reluctance to concede anything in exchange for social acceptance. The acceptability of a culture in society has always been hinged on the universality of the practices, which means that socio-cultural behaviours should be tolerable. How accepted a new comer culture is not only a matter of time, but often a function of economic and political status and of the rehabilitee and familiarity of its social and cultural practices. The support often given by a community to authors who speak to their concerns at a given time should not be dismissed. In fact, to imagine that there is a direct link between the social integration of an

ethnic group and the literary prestige of individual writers is to over simplify the working of the cultural market.

Very frequently, works of literature are real authors' identity borders and single voices gain a confident acceptance that is denied to the overall group. This is the case with Abu-Jabers' writings, as Robin Field points out when she describes her as being "warmly received by the American public" (Field, 2006:208). Though, she also notes that some works face certain rejection or lack of understanding as publishers are reluctant to bring out some books and require "sweeping changes", as they are afraid of the potential book low popularity (Ibid.). The positive reception of many minority authors may attest to the impulse of readers to get "to know the other", it also carries the almost inevitable burden of representation, as individual authors are expected to speak for an imagined uniform and cohesive group.

1.1 Trends of Arab immigration to the USA

Arab-American society has been defined along cultural, economic, political, and religious lines, which have been resented by the larger American society. Interviews with the early Arab immigrants (1860) show that most of them were not fleeing persecution, but were looking for economic opportunities, often enticed by money sent by friends and family who had migrated earlier. In these letters, pioneer migrants embellished and exaggerated the presupposed opportunities for success in the new world (Naff: 1999: 38.). One of the more striking interviews is an 1882 account by a *New York Times* reporter of three 'pitiful looking' Syrian Arabs, who had just arrived:

'They came from Lebanon and were dressed in the peasant costume of their country – blue, baggy trousers that were fastened at the knee [...] On their head they wore the conventional fez [...] The reporter asked them what had induced them to come to the United States [...] They had found it very difficult to get along at home in the Lebanon. Their friends had represented to them that America was a great and wealthy country, where they could get along first rate, and advised them to go there.' (*New York Time* 1882).

The first arrival of immigrants to the United States is dated before the World War from 1861 to 1914, and their initial occupations were primarily as peddlers of dry goods to the different ethnic groups who were also beginning to settle in the country. In the book

Arab-American Faces and Voices, Elizabeth Boosahda observes that, “generally, they maintained their Arab culture through food and its presentation, the Arabic language, religion (Christianity and Islam), dance, music, literature, philosophy, poetry and storytelling” (Boosahda,2003: Preface 12). In addition, the first immigrants “had a strong drive to be independent entrepreneurs” (11). After the civil war and the opening of the West, the United States faced a strong necessity of skilled labour force to work in industry and other developing areas. As a matter of fact, “American agents were sent to villages in [the Middle-East] in order to persuade cheap labour forces with promises of wealth and independence” (Boosahda, 2003:7). But once on the American soil, and because of this strong feeling of displacement and nostalgia, there was an eager desire to return to the homeland by most immigrants. According to Lisa Majaj, the cultural context faced by the first immigrants was “heavily assimilationist” (Majaj, 2008: 52). As she explains, “the question of how to respond to such pressures while also maintaining an Arab identity was a matter of great importance to the early immigrant community: newspapers and journals published debates about how to preserve Arab identity in the American-born generation, even as they discussed practical matters of integration” (Ibid.).

The beginning of the World War I is another historical land mark for the first immigrants; the contact with their homelands became more difficult and the strict laws of immigration in the 1920 “increased the community’s sense of isolation and encouraged a feeling of communal unity and solidarity, which had began during the war” (Ludescher, 2006: 98).

The second generation of immigrants started arriving after the World War II. Unlike the first arrivals who were mostly Christians, the new contingents were Muslims. As Tanyss Ludescher states:

“The second wave of immigrants consisted of educated, skilled professionals, who were more likely to be familiar with the nationalist ideologies that permeated the Arab world. Unlike the Syrian Christians, they staunchly identified themselves as Arabs. Included in this group were a number of Palestinian refugees who had been rendered stateless as a result of the catastrophic 1948 Arab-Israeli War.” (Ludescher, 2006: 94)

A third distinct generation of immigrants comprehends those who arrived from 1967 to the present day. Due to political events of these decades, these new arrivals found

a more hostile environment. In fact, the end of the quota system in 1965 conjugated with political conflicts in the region such as the Israeli occupation in Palestine and the Lebanese civil war produced a great wave of political refugees. This new group was highly politicized. For the first time, Arab American organizations were formed to defend the Arab point view and to combat negative stereotypes in the popular press. Newly sensitized to their ethnic identity by worldwide political events, the descendants of the first and the second wave immigrants joined their newly arrived countrymen in support of Arab concerns. In a study of Arab-Americans in the Political Process, Michael W. Suleiman highlights some points of differences between each generation. Adding to that, new arrivals saw themselves as an ethnic community aware of their political and ambiguous social status within the racial system of the United States. However, despite representing a significant group in the United States, the existence of Arab peoples has often been the target of negative stereotypes and discrimination, especially after September 11 attacks.

The last part of the nineteenth century and the beginning of twentieth century saw a great literary movement in Arabic literature. Indeed, at that time, a group of young intellectuals from Syria and Lebanon have immigrated to USA due to many reasons such as the Lebanon civil war, the lack of democracy and the economic crisis in their countries. These young talents had a deep interest towards their motherland and language, Arabic. They contributed to help the development of Arabic language and literature in their host land. Aida Imangulieva writes:

“Those Arab immigrants who succeeded in establishing themselves in America took a keen interest in the life of the homeland they had forsaken, and strove to preserve their national traditions and language. In order to unite still more closely in this foreign land the Arabs joined together in various clubs and societies and started newspapers and magazine.” (Imangulieva, 2009:20).

The wider American society thrives on the independence of personal mind and liberty not expecting one’s autonomy to be tied by cultural beliefs and laws that act as obstacles to creative intellect. This situation therefore made “the Arab American literature produced by early generation Arab immigrants seems to perpetuate traditional Arab literature” as Ludescher (2006:96) claims. The use of Arab culture as a defining tool for their literature was simply a way by writers to reconnect with their homeland; however, it made it difficult for their work to find acceptability among the mainstream readers.

(Ludescher, 2006: 103). While the pioneers, namely, Kahlil Gibran, Ameen Rihani and Mikhail Naimy were more attached to traditional conventions and claimed they were not applicable in the American society. Clearly, this does not mean those writers forgot about their roots or tried to alienate themselves from Arab culture. Nonetheless, they showed that they were a part of the multi-ethnic American society.

The need of Arab Americans to preserve their cultural identity has been expressed in the new writer's literary work, becoming, thus, their defining point. This case has made it difficult for the larger society to be attracted to the work because it pursues a narrow community's hegemonic interests that may not be the interest of the whole society in general. Though, as has been mentioned above, the contemporary American society is steadily changing and Americans become more tolerant and they are ready, at least, to learn more about (if not to accept) different mind-sets and different cultures.

1.2 Evolution of Arab American literature.

Arab American literature has gone through many challenges since the first Arab writers started to publish works in the United States of America. To date, the Arab American literature is still in a state of transformation in directions that cannot be precisely defined. In her interview with Abu-Jaber, Esa Shalal claims that most Arab American writers have struggled to penetrate the American society beyond their communities, because of literary, social, and political issues that have, for a long time, acted as an inhibition to their growth. Arab American literature comes across as work meant to preserve and defend their cultural specificity in a multicultural American society. Abu-Jaber is one of many writers who feel the need to talk about her experience and to help others to cope with similar problems. More so, she states that she writes to help young people of Arab descent to learn more about their culture, to help them build "their own micro cultures" (Shalal, 2002 :39). She adds:

"Abu-Jaber presented her story as a case study of the problems facing Arab-American writers and said the climate was simply not conducive to publishing a book about the expulsion of the Palestinians after the creation of the state of Israel [...] the author still doesn't know if the problem was her prose or the results of racism and politics." (Ibid).

These immigrant Arab intellectuals united around the periodical press and published many outstanding Arabic periodicals in America. The first was *Kawkab Amrika*⁵ (*America's Continent*) published from New York in between 1892-1909 edited by Najib Arbili. Some other example of journals and magazines are *Al-Ayyam(Days)*, 1897, edited by Yusuf Ma'aluf, *Al-Huda(guidance)*, 1898, edited by Nahum Mukarzil, *Mir'atul Gharb(Western mirror)*, 1899, edited by Najib Musa Diyab, *Al-Muhajir(the Migrant)*, 1903, edited by Amin al-Ghurayyib, *Al-Sayeh(Tourist)*, 1912, edited by Abdul Masih al-Haddad, *Al-Funun(Arts)*, 1913, edited by Nasib Arida, *Al-Samee (jovial companion)*, 1927, edited by Ilya Abu Madi, These newspapers, journals and magazines were published mainly in New York, Boston, and Washington in two languages, Arabic and English trying to reflect their life in the New world . These emigrant writers also founded some literary societies. For example 'Al-Rabitah al-Qalamiyah' (*The Pen League*)⁶ , 'Al-Usbah al-Andalusia' (*The Andalusian Society*) and 'Al-Rabitah al-Adabiyah' (*The Literary Bond*) are outstanding.

These earliest Arab American publications reflected the main concerns of their audiences namely religion and politics of their countries of origin in the Middle East. Naaman indicates that this was all done with the belief that the Arab community would one day go back to its homeland (Naaman; 2006:67). Accordingly it made this kind of literature a preserve for Arabs who would want to ,one day, go back to their motherlands. Reading Arab-American literature requires better understanding of the Arabic cultural codes.

⁵ *Kawkab America* *Kawkab America* was the first Arabic-language newspaper in North America; it was published by Arab Orthodox Christians, and its readership was almost exclusively Christian. Typeset by hand, *Kawkab America* was published between 1892 and 1908. It became a daily in 1898. it represented the Young Turks Party in the United States and condemned repression against Armenians in the Ottoman empire.

⁶ *Al-Rabitah al-Qalamiyah (The Pen League)* :was the first Arab-American literary society, formed initially by Nasib Arida and Abdul Masih al-Haddad in 1915 and subsequently re-formed in 1920 under the leadership of Jibran Khalil Jibran. Mikhail Nu'aima was chosen as the secretary and supported by a group of young writers who has been working closely since 1911. Al-Rabitah al-Qalamiyah was the biggest Arabic literary society formed by the writers who were characterized with a new way of thinking. The first members of society were Jibran Khalil Jibran (president) Mikhail Nu'aima (secretary), William Katzefflis (cashier) Ilya Abu madi, Nasib Arida, Rashid Ayyub, Abdul Masih al-Haddad and Nadra al-Haddad. However the famous Mahjar writer, philosopher and poet Amin al-Rihani who lived in New York at those times wasn't a member of this society.

The main objective of 'Al-Rabitah al-Qalamiyah' was to preserve the Arabic language and literature in the 'New World', to bring it to the level which meets the requirements of the modern world literature, as well as to bring innovations and create the literature with release ideas

Arab American literature has gone through many transformations for many years since its advent in 1920 because the styles and themes employed were narrow in such a way that they were specifically meant to capture a specific audience, which was the Arab community, even though they were often written in English. Therefore, according to Rana, “the authors were never interested in capturing an audience beyond their community thus leading to their works being limited in scope.” (Rana, 2011: 548). The need to uphold a form of filial piety in some of their works led to the Arab American writers concentrating more on a writing tone touching on their culture and in turn simply making their writings look like an Arabic translation.

1.3 The New Generation of Arab American writers

In search of acceptability, Arab American literature has had to continuously transform itself over time in the hope that it would create resonance with the American society. Moreover, most of the first generation of Arab Americans are now gone. In their place, there is a new one born and brought up in America, and with distant roots and touch with their original homeland. This group has most of its members identified as Arabs who cannot speak a word in Arabic. Just like any other descendants from minority groups, all they know of the country of origin of their ancestors comes from indirect experiences and family memories. This group is at last producing writers who do not have too much attachment to their Arabic culture but are, in essence trying to create a balance between the two communities to which they belong. Most of the young Arab American writers have been critical of American culture or some of its conventions, a fact that has endeared them to the public. Their criticism though has been balanced since they scrutinise both Middle Eastern and new world cultures. “Previous Arab American writers were reluctant to criticise their community because, being in a foreign land, they felt that it would be disloyal to disown their practices.” As Roger Allen points out it “has not been shared by young Arab American writers who do not feel compelled by the filial piety their customs demand.”(Allen: 2010: 474). They tend to air their views in an American fashion. Their belonging to the American fabric has made them understand what the society is ready to hear, but they also want to write and read about their original culture. While they seek to be accepted and integrated into the mainstream American culture, they have developed a new perception of their life in the USA, incorporating major values of both cultures in their understanding of the world and expressing “a valuable message of understanding in a society founded upon a wealth of cultural combination” (Cherif; 2003: 226), now ready to

accept this viewpoint and eager to examine new ways of development of a truly multi-ethnic democratic society.

This is not to say that these younger writers do not face obstacles previous generation would recognize. The issue of politics as well as religion in the Middle East can be described to be part of any Arab identity and people of all generations passionately hold and express views that may not be popular. For example “Some American publishers have not tolerated the criticism of Israel in their works since they are afraid of being branded anti-Semitic, a fact, which would have much harsher implications in terms of the American public, which has a particular sensitivity to this issue.” (Shalal-Esa,2002: 39).Some publishers are reluctant to release books which can be disturbing or can cause negative reactions from any groups of people. Moreover, political tension between the US and Arab countries contributes to the development of this trend abrogated by the polarities exposed after the 9/11 attacks which revealed the abundance of prejudice which existed in the American Society. Americans became hostile to representatives of the Arabic world and Arab Americans were also perceived as aliens. However, at present, readers are eager to face the diversity of the American society and appear ready to hear different voices and consider new questions raised by Arab writers.

In trying to make better the situation existing, Abu-Jaber follows the path created at the beginning of the twentieth century and believes this approach is suitable for the twenty-first century. In fact, she and other Arab American writers have come up with works that resonate positively with the society they live in because the acceptability of their works by publishers has been limited due to societal expectations and stereotypes that the larger society holds towards the Arab community. As Abu-Jaber confirms in an interview with Shalal, her work has been limited largely concerning what is acceptable for publishing as “the climate is often simply not conducive to publishing a book about the expulsion of the Palestinians after the creation of the state of Israel” (qtd. in Shalal-Esa)⁷. She has been forced to edit and re-edit some of her works numerous times until they have

⁷ It is important to note here that Abu-Jaber never reveals the name of the publishing company that refused her work. While Abu-Jaber’s assertion regarding the difficulties of publishing fictional works on 1948 and its catastrophic consequences for Palestiniens may indeed be true, the publication of a number of works by Arab American authors in recent years contests the legitimacy of this claim. In 2006, for example, Arab American author, Susan Abulhawa, was able to publish her controversial novel *The Scar of David*. This work, which narrates the story of a Palestinian family from a fictional village named Ein Hodd, has received much media attention for its depiction of the forcible removal of Palestinians from their historic homeland in 1948. See <https://www.nysun.com/new-york/visiting-scar-of-david-author-is-criticized/55144/>

lost the lustre the writer had intended for them (qtd. in Shalal-Esa). Arab American literature has always had two themes that are identifiable with their work. These themes are religion and politics back home.

These two constitute the sensitive issues in the American society because the larger American society is always on the other side of the divide when it comes to matters touching on Arabic politics and religion. Therefore, Arab American writers have been inhibited with these factors whenever they want to tell them in their literary works because most publishers would not want them expressed in their publications. More so, they would receive condemnation from the larger society (Shalal-Esa, 2002: 39).

Arabian jazz, for instance, displays the way Arabic immigrants tried to translate “The tongue of their hearth, of irrational, un-American passions” into the language which could be understood by those around them (304).

1.4 Arab women writers

Reading the Arab American literature, one finds that more women dominate this field than would be expected of the Arabic culture. As Naaman points out; “ women have used Arab American literature to find their lost voice in a society that is believed to be patriarchal ” (Naaman, 2006:269).

Women Arab writers such as Naomi Shihab Nye, Suheir Hammad and Diana Abu-Jaber, have succeeded in leaving their prints in literature. Naomi Shihab Nye is a poet, essayist, and anthologist who has published several children's books and a novel in recent years. Although her Arab roots are an important factor in her work, Nye's writing reflects a wide variety of cultural contexts and sources, including the Southwest where she lives and the many places she has travelled. Suheir Hammad, slam poet, is inspired by her poor, working-class childhood in Brooklyn, where she grew up among Puerto Rican children, went to terrible public schools, and experienced the meaning of poverty and skin colour in America. Winner of the Oregon Book Award⁸ and finalist for the National PEN

⁸ The Oregon Award is given annually to contributors whose works are considered to represent “the finest accomplishments by Oregon writers who work in genres of poetry, fiction, literary nonfiction, drama and young readers’ literature.” Past winners have included the following writers: Chang-rae Lee for *Native Speaker* (1992) and Chuck Palahniuk for *Fight Club* (1997).

Hemingway award⁹, Diana Abu-Jaber is a novelist who teaches creative writing at Portland State University. Her award-winning 1993 novel, "Arabian Jazz," brought the story of an Arab immigrant and his two daughters to a mainstream U.S. audience, and W.W. Norton published her new novel, "Crescent," in April 2003..

The Arab American community is still rather patriarchal even though it has adopted many of the American values; some families still cherish their ancestors' perceptions of the world when it comes to gender roles. For instance, Abu-Jaber reveals in her *Arabian Jazz* the hardships of women living in the Arab world through the character of Fatima who is strongly attached to the patriarchal values of her homeland. She stresses that it is really hard to be a woman who should be devoted to the man in the family. Thus Fatima sees the only way out, i.e. to "have husband to survive on the planet of earth" (Abu-Jaber, 2003: 117). Hence, the writer shows that even among the community there are families where females are somewhat marginalised within their members, though younger generations still find their ways to build their lives in accordance with their new cultural values.

Different Arab writers employ different styles that they hope will identify them as Arab Americans because no single writing style has established a foothold in the host society. The continuous transformation of the styles can be attributed to a need to find a foothold. Therefore, according to Albakry and Siler, "the latest style by younger Arab American writers that tends to be critical of their own society is just one of the ways that are being followed to find a standing point for the same search of their identity" (Albakry-Siler, 2012: 113). Admittedly, these young women writers have already been brought up on somewhat different values, or rather on a broader set of values adopting many ways accepted in the American society. This does not signify a rejection of their ethic or an eagerness to forget about their roots. They have been surrounded by different systems of values, Arab (coming from their parents and relatives) and American (coming from their friends, teachers, neighbours, partners, etc.). They feel they cannot blindly adopt Arab values which may make sense in the Arab world but are somewhat limited in the western

⁹The National/Pen Hemingway Award is bestowed upon American authors whose first novels are considered to be significant literary accomplishments. The aim of the National/Pen Organization "is to advance the cause of literature and reading in our region and to defend free expression everywhere." Although Abu-Jaber's novel was not selected for the Award, its short-listing as a finalist extends significant literary recognition upon this work.

world. These young writers are no longer in-between the two worlds, they are becoming parts of the global multi-ethnic community.

They are more open to cultural border crossings, but they are also interested in their ancestors' culture, language and identity. A critical point that should be noted about the Arab American literature and acceptability in society is the political situation around the world. Though the reception of this literature had started improving, it was upset by the 9/11 events that have since opened new doors for alienation and stereotyping. Most Arab writers have found it more difficult to convince the literary world to look at them with a different eye. As "The larger society tends to look at them with a suspicious eye thus resenting any form of writing that is defensive of the Arabic culture or one that seems to be promoting it." (Metres, 2012: 3).

Gender roles in writing has been identified as one way that women have found a platform to communicate their problems to the larger society, which for a long time has been shut out of the goings in the Arab society or which has been disinterested in the Arabic culture. The main difference we can identify is that most Arab American male writers have tended to lean towards the status quo because they are, ultimately, the beneficiaries of the system. However, now many influential male intellectuals are supporting Arab American feminists as "they have also adopted many values of the western society." (Cherif, 2003: 214). This can be a great stride forward as this literature should not be divided into male and female writing. Both groups have a role in shedding light on the complexities of the group integration into the host society providing insights into different aspects of the issue.

Chapter II

Arabian Jazz

Introduction

While the first Arab American writers and those of the second generation tended to write more autobiographical pieces, they generally favoured the representation of an assimilationist attitude. Those writers whose voices began to be heard, in the wake of multiculturalism, have been interrogating the very basis of assimilation and probing the many instances of negotiation, at times even the most intimate ones, that takes place between the homeland and the host land, and that contributes to the development of a unique experience of home for the diasporic subject.

Born in upstate New York, Abu-Jaber spent most of her life going back and forth between her father's homeland, Jordan, and, her mother's homeland, the United States. Her career as a writing professor at Portland University as well as her hyphenated condition allowed her to elaborate on her "in-betweeness." In fact, being a part of two different cultural traditions – Arab (more specifically Jordanian) and American – has become a source from which she draws material for her writings, which Abu-Jaber herself considers "wonderfully healing." Her bibliography includes works of fiction such as *Arabian Jazz* (1993), *Crescent* (2003), *Origin* (2007) and a cookbook-memoir: *The Language of Baklava* (2005). Her novels represent the Arab-American existence from the point of view of someone who is deeply engaged in it and who sways between both sides of the "cultural hyphen". They present themes that consciously mirror issues of ethnicity and immigrant conditions.

Arabian Jazz focuses on the experience of Arab-American in the United States experiencing a racial problem that identifies them both as individual or group as either "black" or "white". As told before, the studies on Arab-American ethnicity and racial formation show that historically Arab-Americans were first considered "not white," then "not quite white," then later "white with a difference ."

The novel focuses on a Jordanian family. The widowed orthodox immigrant, Matussem Ramoud, the father of the family, lives with his two daughters, Jemorah and Melvina, and was accompanied to America by his sister and brother-in-law. After the death of Nora, Matussem's American wife, of typhus during a family trip to Jordan, he and his daughters move to America to live in a middle class house in a run-down, low class neighbourhood. Matussem's American-born daughters are adult, but both seem to still struggle with their identities, contemplating their roles in American culture versus the role they would have in the Middle East. Aunt Fatima, Matussem's devoted muslim sister, wishes that her nieces, Melvina and Jemorah, follow the conventions and traditions of their motherland—Jordan. Fatima obsesses over Melvina and Jemorah's dating life. She feels embarrassed that both of her nieces are not yet married; she makes it her life mission to find suitable, affluent suitors for them. Matussem feels Middle Eastern and still has a stronghold in the traditions of the east, but his deceased wife was a redheaded American. Matussem is struggling just as much as his daughters, attempting to discover his new place in America in the absence of his loving wife. Unlike Melvina, he does not find comfort in a career, but rather feels most at peace making jazz music on his drum set. It is only when he is playing this music in the local bar that he forgets about the death of his wife and the personal crisis that was created through his immigration. Only after Matussem journeys back to Jordan are his daughters able to find themselves and their place within culture. This journey too has a similar effect on Matussem, allowing clarity to his thought process and his actions.

Arabian Jazz develops around the figures of Matussem, a fan of John Coltrane¹⁰, who plays drums with co-workers at the bar Won Ton a Go-Go, and has a distracting relationship with his two daughters. Fatima, on the other hand, is the character who seems to find relief in being attached to her roots and in trying to preserve Arab values. She is an apparently gentle and simple-minded matchmaker whose primary concern is to find suitable Arab husband for her nieces. She has no conception of life outside the patriarchal

¹⁰ John William Coltrane, also known as "Trane" (September 23, 1926 – July 17, 1967), was an American jazz saxophonist and composer. Working in the bebop and hard bop idioms early in his career, Coltrane helped pioneer the use of modes in jazz and was later at the forefront of free jazz. Coltrane and his music took on an increasingly spiritual dimension. Coltrane influenced innumerable musicians, and remains one of the most significant saxophonists in music history.

social order. The speech she often delivers her nieces is: “[...] First and last is that you must have husband to survive on the planet of earth.”(117).The girls have very different outlook. Self centred and self reliant, Melvina, who is devastated by her mother’s death, becomes a nurse and spends her life fighting death in every form. Jemorah, who is more open-minded but confused feels more keenly the pressure of her extended family to marry. She does not marry but quits her job and finally falls in love with a casual hand at the local garage. She is also of two minds about accepting a place at a prestigious university to pursue her graduate studies. This central pattern of confusion and inaction is also reflected in similar incidents played out by the characters around them, it is also reflected as well in a series of flashbacks to the past of the four main characters: Matussem, Fatima, Jemorah and Melvina. The plot details the interactions of the Ramouds' extended family and also looks closely at how a small American town treats the Arab-American community. The novel also focuses on Matussem daughters' struggle with their mixed American and Arab identity, particularly Jemorah's ambivalence about her identity and role.

This chapter discusses some of the components of this hybrid cultural identity such as the stress of in-betweenness and the representations of masculinity in worlds of women since gender is an important axis of analysis around which this study is shaped.

2.1 Music as a cultural tool in *Arabian Jazz*

As mentioned above, *Arabian Jazz*, strategically presents the theme of seeking self-identity for Arab Americans especially those who are recent immigrants. The author writes from a hyphenated point of view by bringing out the situations that many experiences in their life away from their homeland, and the novel explores the different ways they have tried to integrate into the American society.

Abu-Jaber uses music as a meeting point between two cultures that have a few commonalities in the American society. El-Hajj and Harb, for instance, find that she uses jazz to marry the Arab and the African, American communities, which are known to be the pioneers of Jazz music (139). Matussem finds himself at a loss on what he should do to become fully acceptable as an American because the best linkage he had to the American society was his wife who is now demised. The only remaining solution for Matussem was to resort to jazz seeking a link with his beloved dead wife Nora. He misses her strongly and this sense of loss disturbs him, turning him sometimes into a useless father. In the very

beginning of the novel, we are told that every time “Matussem opened his eyes he was baffled with Nora’s death.”(1), he could not believe that she is dead since:

“His wife’s face was imprinted on his consciousness. He thought of her as he drove work in the mornings through ice and rain. His sense of loss was sometimes so potent that he became disoriented.”(1)

Infact, “she had been his history once; now only the land was left” (260). Leaving Euclid, a fictional community near Syracuse, N.Y., where there is not only a small Jordanian enclave, but an extensive, poverty-level white population as well then, meant leaving his history with Nora and his sentimental home. A place where he could, by playing drums, stay in contact with his wife, since:

“He believed that any music was prayer, sending a message out to the sky. Nora was always his audience; she was over there listening. He knew that his drumming-its sound and intensity-had the power to penetrate the heavens and earths” (16).

Abu-Jaber has fused the two cultures through music when she suggests that to flee racial behaviour used against Arabs, they try hard to empathy with a definite group to belong to. Accordingly, Matussem, the leader of music band “The Ramouds”, found himself a devotee of John Coltrane’s music, particularly the composition “Naima”. In his untranslated name and Coltrane’s “Naima,” however, the moments of linguistic, musical, and translational improvisation enter a condition of dialectic density: the blue note. Like the musical blue note, which inflects a musical (usually major) scale of play by reaching for a note from outside the scale, the linguistic blue note forces a dominant language to enter into dialogue with a word imported from another language. In addition, the untranslated Arabic name “Matussem” and the musical piece and untranslated name “Naima” create a potent dialectic of both a linguistic and musical blue note.

Jazz music is used to connect two groups together as a form of cultural dialogue. Jazz in this case can be viewed as a metaphor to portray a person who identifies himself or herself with something he or she is not. Arabian jazz becomes a hybrid music that developed from two different components. In the novel, playing the music whose origin is African American has been called Arabian jazz thus depicting it as being linking two worlds. This complex mixture of Arab-Americans and Jazz as black music invokes

connections between this group and African-Americans. The two words of the title, Arabian and Jazz, symbolize connection between Arab culture and “blacks” music. Hence, the title alerts the reader that this work is defining a new sort of jazz, one which is Arabian. It also implies that Arabs can be understood through jazz underlining a shared understanding through culture rather than establishing a bridge between the two groups which is only based on shared misrepresentation.

In her search of belonging, Jemorah seeks to find her identity. She settles for black as her identity because she is not acceptable as a white though her mother was white, but her father was an Arab (294). She is on a quest of reconciliation between her background and present life as a young Arab American woman, the daughter of a Jordanian-Palestinian father and a deceased American mother. Because she is not identified as "white" or "black," her racial identity is explicitly questioned by other characters in the novel. For example, Jemorah's white American cousins connect her Arab heritage and brown skin to something dirty. In a revealing scene in which Jemorah's new boss, Portia, declares her racist logic about Matussem, her Jordanian father:

“[...]Oh, sure, you're tainted, your skin that color. A damn shame. But I've noticed that in certain lights it's worse than in others.[...] I'm telling you, Jemorah Ramoud, your father and all his kind aren't any better than Negroes, that's why he hasn't got any ambition and why he'll be stuck in that same job in the basement for the rest of his life..” (294).

While responding to her employer's ridicule, Jemorah satirically says that her paternal grandmother was black and that she used such roots to identify herself as black;“My father's mother was black [...] Yeah, a former slave. She married her master who had twenty six other wives. They were black, brown, and yellow, and some didn't even have skin.” (295).

Thus, this identification with blacks can only have a common ground in music because, at the end of the day, the Arabic and the black culture seem to have a close meeting point. In general, music beats from any community are danceable by people from all societies without even understanding it. Therefore, the author's employment of music as a stage for a meeting of the two cultures is a seamless way of integrating the Arab story into the American society without making it look as an outsider. The author has used

music to integrate the conservative Arab culture into the American mainstream. Jazz as music is acceptable across the board as its appeal does not seem to offend conservative groups. The use of jazz music also fuses well with Arab oral tradition, which has been one of the ways used to pass culture from one generation to the other.

On the other hand, jazz allows Matussem to connect with his childhood memories as he remembers the drummer of his village back in Jordan;

“There had been a drummer in his family village, a vagrant who pounded at hide - covered drums with his hands at sunup and sundown. He had gone to weddings, funerals and births; the other men would sit with him, overturn pots and kettles and drum with three fingers and the heel of their palms, singing, the women ululating their high voices into the desert. The memory of singing mingled with his memories of the Muslim muezzin, caught like a princess in the tower of the mosque.” (239-240).

It seems that one of the effects of drumming on Matussem is that it makes him feel a certain sense of community directly connected with his childhood memories in Jordan. Drumming is related to social gatherings where people are happy, having fun and celebrating. Moreover, it reminds him of the coexistence between Muslim and Christian people in their home country. Although Matussem is not Muslim, he still remembers the muezzin’s call for prayer. He even tries to imitate him once on a Saturday morning to his daughters’ astonishment, “but you’re not even Muslim! Your family is Syrian Orthodox,” Melvie shouted. ‘The whole neighbourhood can see you up there chanting prayers. Someday you’re going to fall off that roof and break your back” (355). This musical memory related to drumming and also to Muslim religious chanting makes Matussem link music to a common spirituality that binds people from different traditions together.

Thus, we can say that jazz music emerges as a major mean that helps Matussem to recover from his feelings of loss as well as displacement, which derives from the very nature of this musical genre originating from African American work songs and spirituals which were deeply rooted expressions of their communal life. In addition, music has been used by the author to create a common ground between the Arab American community, the African American community and the larger white American community. More so, it fuses the Arab American community and the African American society.

2.2 Home, Exile and In-betweenness in the Construction of Identity.

As already mentioned, the Arab-American community is very heterogeneous. It includes people from different countries and different religions; those who speak no Arabic and those who speak no English; people who identify primarily with the 'Arab side' of their heritage and those who identify primarily with their 'American side'. This diversity further complicates the judgment of what constitutes Arab-American and Arab American identity as well. In deed, identity is one of the important elements in any literary discourse; the use of the term reflects the belief that each person's identity--in the traditional sense of who he or she truly is - is deeply inflected by social features.

Abu Jaber, through her fiction, creates an alternative narrative through Jemorah, Matussem's daughter who questions who she is and how her multiple stories out of which her hybridity is constructed, shape her sense of self. The Jordan as part of her, is depicted through the stories of her aunt Fatima as a sight made of "dark memories...and demons of guilt, [as] ...Fatima was forced to bury alive one newborn sister after another, so that her brother, Matussem, would have enough to eat" (Shakir, 1996:13). In fact, throughout the novel, Fatima is associated with stories of different types. She was kidnapped in childhood

"When I am sixteen, and foolish girl, standing outside alone in the dangerous street, in Jerusalem, the Israelis come for me; this is my punishment, at the hands of God. I think they will kill me. It will be starving to death, for all the food those babies would eaten. It is on their hands now, in the camp of my enemy, bad place. I think, now and end to my bad thoughts in this room of theirs without doors. It is nothing to the room I live in, in myself! [...] And they let me live. After four days alone with misery, I am let go of their prison, I am left even by my enemies. I am returned to die again, again, again." (335)

The burial alive of her four younger sisters "so my baby brother can eat, so he can move away and never know about it" (334) is another secrete story that she keeps hidden in her mind. Only at the end of the novel when she could reveal what haunted her all her life. In fact, she is a domineering character who represents an Arab community that lives in America but maintains a strong sense of the 'Old Country'. The very designation of Fatima as 'aunt' anticipates storytelling as in Middle Eastern communities older members of the family are often the ones who translate its shared values into tales and enact them in narration.

Yet, Fatima can also be viewed as a representative of the ‘homeless’ immigrant whose journey is forged by aspects of trauma, in-betweenness and loss. Having arrived to America in the 60s, Fatima’s immigration is not a choice as Matussem’s. A year after Matussem did, in order to keep an eye on him.” (3), she fled the ‘Old Country’ after a journey of trauma poverty, burials and imprisonment. Diana Abu Jaber’s portrayal of Fatima is shaped as a shadow to the very end when she finally gives voice to her deepest memories and her dark story. Her journey traces the key landmarks of Abu Jaber’s understanding of ‘homelessness’ and identity.

As said above, before immigrating to America, Fatima witnesses a traumatic series of events namely the burial alive of four of her sisters, as Pauline Kaldas puts it:

“...Fatima also remembers participating in the burials of her infant sisters with her parents when she was only around four years old. The infants were buried because of the family's poverty and so that the other children—especially the one boy, Mutassem—could live” (Kaldas, 2004:175).

Fatima can never tell the story of the tragedy of which she was a spectator at the age of a young girl. She could never reveal such a memory, and has always been a prisoner of both her silence and her trauma. Early in the novel, before Abu Jaber discloses Fatima’s story, we learn that she “...recalled assisting in two, possibly three other furtive burials. None came back to her with the immediacy of that first...The memories moved in and out of her; she returned to them, moving aside this object...” (119). Unable to overstep her trauma, her buried sister’s sound can never be erased from her ‘consciousness and psyche:

“...a small, weightless sound that rose through the years, always floating near the surface of Fatima’s consciousness. Sometimes she heard it in the sound of bathwater or beneath the noise of a crowd. Sometimes when she awoke, very early, in the stillest part of her mind where her dream opened in the dawn, came the tiny bleat--scarcely an echo, but enough to push Fatima from her bed to wander the house and yard, vaguely listening.”(119).

At the very end of the novel, Fatima can only escape the oppression of her trauma through narrating it away, making a rational 'plot' out of the absurd succession of dreadful events. Enveloped in anguish and bitterness, she tells her nieces and Nassir, her nephew,

the educated man who left Jordan to pursue an academic career in Cambridge and Oxford universities:

“...When we were homeless and dying without food, what of the four starving babies I had to bury still alive, living-I, I, I? She said, pushing her palms in their faces, as if the mark of it was there to be read. Can I buy a bar of American soap and wash these away, as you have washed up your self? Babies I buried with my mother watching so the rest could live, so my baby brother can eat, so he can move away and never know about it” (334).

Along with the trauma of her buried sisters, Fatima carries another scar of her journey from Jordan, that of her imprisonment. In fact, “...At the age of sixteen, Fatima is picked up by Israeli soldiers and put in prison for several days with no explanation. When she is released and finds her way home, no one in her family asks about what happened” (Kaldas,2004: 175). The story of her trauma in prison becomes the black hole of her consciousness that devours almost everything that comes close to it:

“...But at some point in 1956 perhaps she was crossing the street to the market place...she was seized without warning for crossing that line...The men wore army jackets; they didn’t speak Arabic .They put her in to a truck so crowded that she couldn’t turn around....Fatima saw a room the colour of which she could never forget, though there was nor word for it in Arabic or English. Later, if she saw this colour.... she would have to sit and put her head between her knees. ” (120-121).

Fatima has attempted to tell herself the story in order to forget or get over its humiliation:

“Fatima lived for two, three, four days without a visitor, without food...she was released. A mistake...She was not beaten [and] was released into...the desert road...They believe they let me out of there, she thought; they never let me out. She would close her eyes and mentally close a door, the door on a tiny brown room of earth. I’ve been waiting to go out, she thought, room in room in room. I am waiting.” (121).

Eventually Fatima mounts her final attempt to overcome her trauma by telling the story when Nassir, a fresh from Jordan cousin, provokes her with a reference to the Palestinian-Israeli clash:

“...I forbid you use such a word in the house of my brother. Is no kind of game, you stupid, stupid boy. For all you lose and learned nothing...what of my parents’ shame, driven off the good land and sacred home the fathers’ father built?...When I am sixteen, and a foolish girl, standing outside alone in the dangerous street, in Jerusalem, the Israelis come for me...I think, now an end to my bad thoughts in this room of theirs without doors. It is nothing to the room I live in, in myself...they let me live. After four days alone with misery, I am left even by enemies. I am returned to die again, again, again.” (334-335).

Fatima’s journey is endless, leading to no ‘home’ except a traumatic story that she has to tell in order to break free of her paralysing prison of memory:

“FATIMA LAY AWAKE on her bed, trying to get rest, to push memory out of her mind. She had a picture in her head of a door opening on a door opening on a door. She stepped from room to room...to the constant invasions of relatives, sixteen sharing five rooms, to a room on the border of two countries. It was unclear what countries these were or where precisely the dividing line was drawn...Sometimes she would tell herself a story about that time, the day in the village. She would think: I was left in a room somewhere, and I waited. Such waiting is worse than a beating. Worse than death...” (120-121).

Fatima has always been enclosed in her traumatic memory; thus, she becomes a representative of that enclosure which turns to be ‘home’, as Pauline Kaldas writes: “... the image of a series of rooms serves as a refrain in Fatima's memories and weaves together the novel's theme of enclosure.” (Kaldas, 2004: 175). In the same line of thought, Fatima, as a character, can be read as a representative of an imprisoned community under the load of silence, trauma and ‘homelessness’:

“Fatima's memories of her sisters' burials are crucial to her development as a character ... Her sense of guilt and the silence that accompanies her memories continue to hold her prisoner. As the reader gains insight into Fatima's past, her flamboyance dissolves and she becomes a central character [with her] struggle with ... silence [and] memory ...” (Kaldas, 2004:175).

The clash with traumatic memories and patriarchal narratives in the case of Fatima takes a different aspect with the novel's main character: Jemorah. According to Portia, Jemorah will always be an Arab misfit. Portia's racial attitude shows her explicit

representation of Jemorah whom she addresses to emphasize on her inferiority insisting on her paternal Arab origin, which Portia connects to dirt, savageness and the threat to the 'American whiteness'.

“Your mother used to be such a good, good girl. She was so beautifully white, pale as a flower. And then, I don’t know. What happened? The silly girl wanted attention. She met your father in her second year [of college] and she just wanted attention. We just weren’t enough for her. I’ll tell you, we couldn’t believe it. This man, he couldn’t speak a word of our language, didn’t have a real job. And Nora was so—like a flower, a real flower, I’m telling you. It seemed like three days after she met that man they were getting married. A split second later she was pregnant. I know for a fact her poor mother—your grandmother— had to ask for a picture of the man for her parish priest to show around to prove he wasn’t a Negro. Though he might as well have been, really, who could tell the difference, the one lives about the same as the other. . .” (293-294).

Abu Jaber explains how Jemorah dramatizes the struggle of the ‘hyphen’, unable to locate herself, or to know who she really is as Evan comments: “...Jem. I think of her as someone who is trying to fight through what she's been told she is” (Evans, 1996: 45). Jemorah’s struggle to find her ethnic balance turns her into a ‘homeless’ character, living the burden of emptiness, and traumatic stories of the past in childhood with Nora, her mother, whom she loses as a young girl. The only ‘home’ possible for Jemorah is made of flashbacks as she returns to her memories. The only ‘home’ she imagines is one with her mother. She feels the burden of the loss of ‘home’, and of self, identity, and memory.

Although Jemorah’s mother, Nora thinks of America as home for Jemorah: “...Your home is here. Oh, you will travel, I want you to. But you always know where your home is...” she fails to fit in and belong to her American part of the hyphen and she feels marginalized and excluded. Thus, she turns to her Arab half and tries to understand that side of her hyphen. She has no reference, other than Aunt Fatima's 'Old Country', patriarchal narrative. To Fatima, Jemorah is Arab, belongs to Jordan and her ‘home’ is marriage as she always reminds her:

“Fatima looked at Jem and Melvie, her eyes black as cups of Matussems coffee, and she murmured in English, 'Beautiful! Beautiful [baby]! Pure as water. You

come back to home soon, come back to the Old Country, marry the handsome Arab boys and makes for us grandsons!”(77).

Fatima’s obsession with the marriage issue shapes her relationship with her resisting nieces whom she tries to instil from an early age that the family’s honour depends on them. This idea is shared by the girls’ other aunts, as well:

“It seemed to Jem that virtually from the hour of her mother’s passing, her aunts had converged a round her with warnings about men. They told her: stay with your father, he needs you now; ignore boys, they’re stupid and dangerous; you don’t know what they can do to you, what they want to do. Each summer, visiting Auntie Nabila or Lutfea or Nejla would take Jem’s face between her hands and examine Jem’s lips to see if she’d been kissed. “Not yet,” they’d whisper, crossing themselves. “*Al humd’illah*, thanks be to God. She’s a good girl!” (9-10)

Here Abu-Jaber questions a main issue related to Arab culture, concerning the commonly widespread image of the woman as the standard-bearer of the family’s honour, which is closely associated to female sexuality. In this case, Abu Jaber exposes how female virginity is considered to be symbol and guarantee of honour, hence the restrictions imposed on women to contain and control their sexuality. Accordingly, it seems that the only way to maintain a family’s honour is through finding a suitable Arab husband for a virgin daughter according to the conventions of their Arab background. In this way, the daughter moves from her family’s control sphere to that of her husband’s.

For Fatima, coming back to origins is equal to the going back home, to Jordan. The 'fatherland' embodied ultimately in marriages subsumes all concepts of 'home'. Jordan is Jemorah’s continuity and connection to her roots. In Fatima’s words:

“At home, she surrounded by so much family, more family than she know what to do with! Peoples who loves her, who protects her, who cut their right arms off and give to her! Not like here in this evil of evils where she is an outcast...Let her go to the people who are loving her” (329).

When Jem was very young, her mother had told her that when she was first born they’d had German measles together and had lain in the same sickbed with fever for weeks(79). Jemorah finds her mother’s absence unbearable, feels her dead mother’s

presence, and is haunted by it. In fact, she transforms her mother into a mythical creature in a story that replaces and becomes 'the real':

“...In Jordan the pleasures of the familiar were gone... Her mother was also there, her memory residing in the steepening streets. She was a jinni, whose real activity Jem could scarcely remember, less a memory than a presence who might fly out from any crook or corner, perhaps from the tubs of corn and butter vendors carried on mule back...” (81).

Jemorah’s maternal loss was an unbearable burden that she feels unable to endure. She can only think of her mother 'as a story': “A week after Nora’s death, Jem began to wonder if her mother had ever been real, or if she was just a sweet story that Jem had told herself.” (81).

Finding it difficult to fit in with her American half, and belong to it, Jemorah turns to a world of her own, filled with the figure of her dead mother as constructed in her mythical narrative. In fact, Jemorah, being an ‘exile’ in Said’s reading of the term exile turns from the ‘real’ world of the stories she units marked by its absence of ‘home’ to an ‘unreal’ world of exile marked by its presence and ironically giving her a feeling of belonging: “ Much of the exile’s life is taken up with compensating for disorienting loss by creating a new world...the exile’s new world, logically enough is unnatural and its unreality resembles fiction” (Said,2001(a):181). Jemorah’s ‘exilic’ psyche develops a fictitious ‘new world’ of hers made up of an imaginative narrative and day-dreams:

“At other times after the death, Jem wandered Auntie Rein’s limitless house, feeling the flesh-ache of her mother’s absence, continually expecting that she might still find her mother alive and waiting for her beyond the next hallway, mistaking the backs of other women’s heads, the curves of their hands, for her mother’s.....She felt herself drawn as if pulled toward the open space, as if her mother had reached for her in that moment, as if her soul had just slipped through one of the big windows, out to the sky”.(82).

Through her ‘new world’, Jemorah moves a story of what she can call ‘real’, compared to the ‘unreal’ from both of which she is excluded:

“Sometimes Jem dreamed of that early time. The illness would be there; moist and warm, it clung to them like a vapour as they held each other. They breathed

together, in and out, sharing breath. Her mother's arms encircled her. The fever was smoke, fire their skin. The smoke filled them, thick in Jem's chest" (79).

As Jemorah realises her mother's absence in the reality of her narrative, she is paralyzed, living in the 'unreal world' of her present in which the past becomes only traumatic as Jemorah feels 'eternal' loss and decides to retreat to get more stories:

"After the death, time unmoored itself. Jem felt like she was living inside the Water babies tale that her maternal grandmother used to read to her- fairy-children like mermaids swept along the world's currents. She swam in loss, and it seemed other children were different, at great distances from her..." (80)

Back in the 'real' world, Jemorah aims to construct a 'real' image of her mother as a memory. She goes back to photographs, being the only way to reconstitute such a memory. She reaches to a: "...family photo album...the one that dated from before their trip to Jordan...To Jem, it was a collection of half-thoughts, gestures, and messages from her mother's life. Her mother was smiling in every shot" (192). Yet, Jemorah thinks of the photographs as void of any memory: "nearly all white, just the bare, gray outlines of a smiling bundled-up child in a pretty woman's arms....both faces turned, inexplicably, up to the brilliant sky" (195).

Unable to reach any sense of belonging to her American half, neither in the narrative of the world from which she is excluded, nor in the one she creates in her stories, Jemorah is again an 'exile' according to Said:

"Exile is one of the saddest fates...since it [does] not only [mean] years of aimless wandering away from family and familiar places, but also meant being a sort of permanent outcast, someone who never felt at home, and was always at odds with the environment, inconsolable with the past, bitter about the present and the future." (Said, 2001(b):369).

Abu Jaber succeeds at portraying the site of Jemorah's struggle between contradictory narratives; her mother's, her own, and her aunt's as the location of the failure to belong:

"Everything around her-of the way the strange faces turned and rushed forward, of gestures and glances, of the world of these people who didn't know her or want to know her. Who might even have wanted to hurt her. Somehow the world had

shifted; she'd entered a place that no longer felt benign..... she felt she was seeing with Aunt Fatima's eyes; she heard her aunt's voice saying, "This is not our place, not our people..." (298).

Progressively, Jemorah finish by understanding the absence of home, and of maternal loss: "... Her mother had left before she could show Jem where her place might be..." (299). Jemorah voices her failure to 'fight' for 'home' in America, to solve out her 'homelessness' without her mother's presence, as an obligation to weave a new narrative of an identity her American hyphen is denied: "...I haven't figured out what part is our mother, either. It's like she abandoned us, left us alone to work it all out" (308).

2.3 The representation of Fatherhood in the novel.

Arab and Arab American fathers as portrayed in late twentieth to early twenty first century novels are placed in an ambiguous situation, between traditional and liberal models of masculinity, and this result in different performances of their role as fathers. The novel foregrounds the possibility for new Arab fatherhoods to emerge

Matussem is the main character in the novel. His favourite activity, playing what he calls "Arabian Jazz", gives the novel its title. As mentioned previously, Matussem was born in Jordan, the youngest of seven children, and migrated to the United States in 1959 because he falls in love with Nora, an American woman of Irish descent. He works in hospital's maintenance office, but his passion is drumming. Through his music, he is able to make sense of his life in-between the Arab world and the United States. It is said in the novel that "his displacement was a feature of his personality" (98), Matussem appears first as a father who seems psychologically disturbed by the memory of his wife. He is trapped in this sense of loss after the death of Nora. Later in the story, we find out that he is held responsible for Nora's death by her parents (twenty years earlier Nora, died of typhus during a visit to Jordan—"on purpose to make Arabs look bad, " claims Aunt Fatima.). Therefore, his memories of the homeland are dark and gloomy. His daughters are always there to awaken the memory as he experiences more miseries alone. This becomes more obvious when we learn that Nora has been everything for Matussem. At the end of the story, we recognise that he has reached a psychological stability because of the United States that gave him the possibility to have the family he wanted, a fluid notion of family based on love. As it is described in the novel:

“America was the place where his world began, away from the webs of family. In the new, wild western country, family flew into particles, relatives moved, changed courses, sifted around each other like the snow, the amazing interwoven flakes sweeping off the belly of Ontario that meteorologists called “lake-effect”.[...]It was dangerous to create a new kind of family, to be so vulnerable to the elements. This was the kind of living he had come to want for himself, the choice to live together, to love.” (264)

In the Arab setting, women are supposed to be obedient and submissive to their men. They are also not supposed to break cultural rules pertaining to their culture as Fatima structures it when she describes men as having been born lucky. They can do whatever they want and are not supposed to be reprimanded or criticised especially by women. Fatima sarcastically comments on the condition of women “Weren’t women like black orchids, in the sorrow of their bodies, meant to be used up, to wither like roses, left in rockers, over sewing and TV, left without men or children, knowing their lives had never really been their own?”(337). According to Fatima women are constructed as passive and weak subjects dominated by male authority and confined in pre ordained roles. However, the writer presents these as questionable and dismantles them through the use of irony. Fatima’s turbulent and unsuccessful attempts to marry her nieces’ turn her into a figure of ridicule which prompts the reader to critically question and reject a practice that voluntarily bypasses the person concerned. Moreover, by portraying Fatima’s determination and her dominance over her brother, who does not interfere in his daughters life and is not interested in marrying them, the author provides the reader with a different concept of Arab women, one in which women are not simply victims but can also become the enforcers of patriarchal power.

Matussem has all the freedom to make decisions on where he wants to settle down. Thus, he goes away from his homeland to settle in America. Though he has chosen America as his new home, he is divided on whether to bring up his daughters in the American way or bring them up strictly in the Arab culture. As Albakry and Silver state: “This confusion shows the freedom men have in making their decisions and at the same time depicting the limitations they are supposed to put in a woman’s life.” (Albakry & Siler, 2012: 112). Matussem according to his native Arabic culture is supposed to bring up his daughters in a purely Arabic manner though he is not tied by many of its rules, he does not consider the role of the father as the most important in his life. As Julie Peet pointed

out “ Arab masculinity has always been very much related to fatherhood. For Matussem, fatherhood is central” (Peet Julie, 1994:31). For example, in a concert, he introduces himself as:

“Call me Big Daddy,” Matussem chanted on “I am Pere, Abu,Fader, Senior, Senior. Call me Pappy, Pappa, Padre, Paw Paw, Sir!...call me Big Daddy! I’ve got a car and two daughters, I’m free! Is my life s work of the world, is nice work if you can get. My greatest work, a father! Now for fathers out there in fatherland, a little song we’re making up as we go, I call “Big Daddy”!”(148-9).

For Matussem, therefore, fatherhood is a lifetime job that he is pleased and proud to exerce, taking into account that he is aware of the huge responsibility he has to bear to take care of Jem and Melvina. Many scholars like David J. Eggenbeen and Chris Knoester, for instance, in their study on masculinity have investigated questions related to the importance of fatherhood. While emphasizing that fatherhood is important to masculinity, they find that activities of fatherhood and caring for families such as feeding, nurturing, and participating in direct childcare often take a back-seat to work. They argue that fatherhood is changing, but it is still seen as being centred on a traditional idea of the father as a leader and a provider rather than as a nurturer or cleaner. This is obviously not Matussem’s case as a widowed father in charge of taking care of all the needs of his daughters.

Moreover, Matussem’s own sense of fatherhood is central to the construction of his relationship with his daughters. In this sense, Jemorah thinks that: “He wouldn’t be the same father, she knew, if he had stayed in Jordan and raised them there. His removal was part of that soft grieving light behind his eyes and part of the recklessness of his laugh” (98).

This internal monologue sheds light on Matussem’s in-betweenness as an Arab immigrant in America and his ongoing process of negotiation as a man and, of course, as a father. In this context, his daughters have grown up listening to the stories he tells them, and that he calls “instructional stories.” Jem even refers to her father as “Shahrazad, giving life” (99) through his storytelling. Matussem “populated America with figures from his childhood stories. Jem thought it sharpened his focus on the world” (98).

Matussem here can stand for Abu-Jaber’s father as she has often mentioned his storytelling: “My father and my uncles are all great storytellers, and they regaled us with

jokes, fables and reminiscences about their growing-up years. And that storytelling, along with food, was one of the great pillars of my own cultural education” (Field 2006: 221). Likewise, Matussem’s stories play an important role in his daughters’ cultural education. Abu-Jaber is switching roles as she charges the father with the task of performing an inter-generational cultural transmission, which is normally dedicated to a female figure like a mother, for example.

Matussem memories of his father are full of affection and always related to generosity and justice which represent important marks of Arab tradition: “though the family had struggled with poverty, their father was generous to visitors with food and shelter, respected by all the village for his insight and sense of justice” (263). He also conceives his music as his “only way back to his father’s voice” (Ibid).

Besides, in his youth, he remembers his sisters’ sufferings that Salwa Essayah Cherif summarizes as follows:

“Matussem’s memories of Jordan consist in having been spared his sisters’ hardships. As the only son in an Arab family of daughters, Matussem “Knew, watching and overhearing his sisters at night, that it was a bitter thing to be a woman” (187). He remembers being fondled in his mother’s arms, when he was outgrown her lap, while her voice poured insults at his sisters around them. His memory of home consists of “so many lonely sisters” and of “social restrictions that kept them home” (233) until they were married off, as Matussem also remembers, to men they had never seen before in their lives”(Salwa Essayah Cherif 2003:212-213)

Accordingly and because of his sisters’ endurance, Matussem shows no gender restrictions to his daughters. He had to carefully handle the concept of family, patriarchy and masculinity. He had to face changes in his life when he moved to the United States with his wife Nora. There, he had to convince himself that the type of masculinity he had learned in Jordan has to adapt the notion of the family in the west, without falling in the negative aspects of the most traditionally patriarchal Arab conception about the submission of women. That’s why he gives freedom to his daughters. His worries were only about their well-being but not restricting them. “He would never throw his daughters away into unwanted marriage” (187).

His in-betweenness has allowed him to question, if not partially challenge, beliefs of domination of women that circulated in his old world. Therefore, Matussem questions Arab traditions when he considers that “[h]e would never throw [his daughters] away into unwanted marriage”, but he is located in-between his two cultures and is hesitated about what is best, since he wonders “what was right for them? How could he ever know?” (187).

In reshaping this identity, Matussem creates a new model of fatherhood that embraces both the advantages of fatherhood of the Arab world and the positive image of the father proposed by the west.

In conclusion, music, gender and fatherhood are undoubtedly key elements for the analysis of Abu-Jaber’s novel. They bring together different ethnicities. Those people who have lived generations in Diaspora do not consider returning home as a solution; but, they seek to be part in the New World and at the same time have their homeland engraved in their mind. Thus, Abu-Jaber’s use of music to stage experiences of African American art and metaphorically presented them via characters that belong to two cultures. Infact, through out the novel, there is a gradually widening scope of understanding the “half-and-half” experience of the characters, moving from a concrete meaning (half “white American” half “Arab American”) to a more universal perception. Also, Diana Abu-Jaber underlines the significance and power of music and love, both matters celebrated in *Arabian Jazz*, the ability to harmonize differences: American and Arab cultures; man and woman; young and old; modern and traditional.

Chapter III

Crescent

Introduction:

As mentioned before, Abu-Jaber as one of the most praised authors of contemporary Arab American literature celebrates Arabs culture and at the same time deconstructs the perception of homogeneity that characterises many approaches to Arab life in mainstream America the way Arabs are perceived by Americans. In her second novel *Crescent*, she raises serious questions about hyphenated identities, exile, homesickness, self-discovery, and cultural transmission. The narrative structure is based on the strong connection between food and nostalgia for the far homeland. Besides that, food - the Middle Eastern food- appears as an important aspect of the Arab American identity. In this sense, food as in the case of other ethnic literature is a key element in the construction of Arab-American identity. Its representation in literature provides an interesting field for examining identity, ethnicity, and cultural belonging. *Crescent* presents a rich depiction of food intertwined with memory and provides the ground for the discussion of ethnicity, political and identity issues and explores the complexities of power relationships and the order of a given society.

The novel is about Sirine, a single 39 years old Iraqi-American woman, who is a sort of Goddess in Café Nadia, where she works as a cook. Her reputation derives from the fact that she is a gentle character, and also because she prepares every sort of Arab delicacy to please and consol a small group of immigrants and exiles from the Middle East. Among the regular customers there are shop-owners from the neighborhood, and students and teachers from the nearby University, amongst whom stands out Hanif, a young, clever, intense, handsome, intellectual refugee from Iraq.

Sirine and the attractive Professor meet, talk, casually flirt at a party, like each other, hang around, make love, have their first scraps, reconcile, make love a bit more, and finally fall in love. The two lovers are surrounded by a line-up of well defined characters, such as her uncle, the Lebanese owner of the café Um-Nadia, and her daughter Mireille, Victor and Cristobal, who, too, work at the café, the Persian Koorosh, the Turkish butcher

Odah, Aziz, and Nathan, an American student obsessed with Hanif and photography and King Babar, Sirine's affectionate uncle's dog.

Both Sirine and Hanif have an intricate past that surfaces through their night dreams and their discussions together. Relevant of the icing on the cake is the parallel story of Aunt Camille and her reckless son Abdelrahman Salahadin, "the story of how to love"(5), says Sirine's uncle whose tale could very well be in the *Arabian nights* collection, which in fact it does hit-off. Going back to the descriptions, some of Abu-Jaber's scenes are truly memorable and very 'Arabian', such as:

"Um-Nadia waits until the air is roasted chocolaty, big and smoky with the scent of brewing coffee. Then she knocks the front door latch open. She holds the door wide and lets the older returning students, the immigrants and workingmen in, one by one, morning-shy, half-sleepy, hopeful from dreams, from a walk in the still-sweet air, not so lonesome this early in the day." (42).

From the very beginning, the book is full of smells, flavors and textures of the fantastic food Sirine cooks and the others eat. Abu-Jaber also uses other themes in the book such as the loneliness of Arabs, which is the loneliness of all people forced to leave their country for reasons independent of choice, and Saddam Hussein's dictatorship in Iraq, which is explored from different angles, including from that of the American embargo in Iraq.

The present chapter aims at exploring the representation of food in Abu-Jaber's *Crescent* as being of great importance for the individual's identity; she further explores the important link between food and identity in which the preparation of Arab dishes draws different ethnicities of both Arabs and non-Arabs in the space of Nadia's Café, where a assorted community comes into existence. The variety of roles of women is also enhanced in the book by particular scenes that deconstruct misconceptions about Arab and Muslim women.

3.1 Food as a Cultural Tool in *Crescent*

Crescent was written during the period of the sanctions imposed on Iraq following the end of the 1991 Gulf War and which had not been quite lifted when the invasion of Iraq started in 2003. In the novel, Abu-Jaber tackles issues of identities, self-discovery,

homesickness, and cultural transmission. In her writings, she often uses food as a literary device and a significant theme. In fact, the omnipresence of food and eating in her books (*Crescent* and in the memoir *The Language of Baklava*) are significant symbols since they are often used as connectors to the homeland in the United States, establishing a bridge between the place of origin and that of the new setting. Feeling displacement, the Arab characters in her novels resort to food which becomes a tool for recalling and reviving the memories of the homeland they left behind. Thus, it turns to be a stimulus to self-understanding as Abu Jaber herself tries to find her place in a world made up of pancakes and 'kefta' as a child.

In the novel, the narrative structure is intermixed with flashbacks where memory and food are strongly associated. In addition, Middle Eastern food emerges as an essential symbol of the Arab American ethnicity. The novel is about Sirine, a girl born to an Iraqi father and American mother, who now lives with her uncle and a cherished dog named King Babar. She works as a chef in a Lebanese restaurant; her passions are excited only by the preparation of food, until a handsome Iraqi exiled professor of Arabic literature, named Hanif Al Eyad, starts visiting the café for a little home cooking. Falling in love arouses Sirine's curiosity about memories of her mixed parents and questions about her identity as an Arab American. Nadia Café, a Lebanese restaurant set in an Iranian area of Los Angeles, where Arab migrants meet together to eat their favorite Arab dishes and sooth their longing for home. Its clientele is diverse; foreign students, individuals belonging to different ethnic, racial and national groups who gather, eat the food prepared by Sirine, and exchange conversations in a convivial atmosphere with the intention of soothing their longing for home. The feeling of belonging to a particular place is outlined as a gradual and developing process that engenders attachment and estrangement, affiliation and isolation.

Inspite of being a hyphenated person, Sirine does not speak Arabic, her father's language, nor does she fully embrace her father's religion. The heritage she has from her father is the old recipes of Arab dishes. Her parents were working care personnel for the American Red Cross and were killed in a tribal clash in Africa. As the narrator comments, "on the day she learned of their deaths, Sirine went into the kitchen and made an entire tray of stuffed grape leaves all by herself" (56).

When Sirine started working at the café, it is to this memory that she returns as the text explains: “She went through her parents’ old recipes and began cooking the favorite – but almost forgotten – dishes of her childhood. She felt as if she were returning to her parents’ tiny kitchen and her earliest memories” (22).

Cooking Arab food represents not only the bond she uses to refresh her emotional memories of her parent’s home, but it also helps her find her Iraqi identity. Indeed as Sirine witnesses the Arab students closing their eyes while eating, she knows that her baklava brings them the taste of home. For her, cooking this special dish also serves to give order to her day. “Sirine feels unsettled when she begins breakfast without preparing baklava first; she can’t find her place in things.” (66). Spending much of her time in the café’s kitchen makes her feel as if she were in her mother’s kitchen again.

By cooking for her customers, Sirine is a comforting link to a faraway home:

“Especially Sirine They (the Arab exiles and immigrants at Nadia’s café) love her food –the flavours that remind them of their homes –but they also love to watch Sirine with her skin so pale it has the bluish cast of skim milk, her wild blond head of hair, her sea-green eyes... she is so kind and gentle-voiced and her food is so good that the students cannot help themselves –they sit at the tables, leaning toward her.” (19-20).

In fact, the smells and flavours of her food seem to smooth the feeling of loss of their homelands. As Fadda-Conrey claims:

“The most important bridges are Sirine herself and the Middle Eastern food she cooks. From her pivotal position in the kitchen, which opens out to the rest of the café, Sirine serves as an integral connecting link, joining together the different communities and individuals of Crescent’s ethnic borderlands”(Fadda-Conrey,2006:196).

As previously said, the Arab restaurant becomes a melting pot of culture since Arabs from different parts of the world are seen to come together and shed light to their ethnic and tribal identities enmities to create a positional community to adopt a new one that they will further on “be identified with while in a foreign country” (Fadda-Conrey, 2006:189). In writing about the reconstruction of the old home in the new one, Diana Abu-

Jaber often uses kitchens as places to reinforce, shape, or change identities. Using the words of Nadia's describes it, 'Alladin's Hidden Treasure' a little fragment of their homelands where food becomes a common ground for people who wish to mix with other cultures. This is the case when the two American police officers who love the Arab stew identify with foreigners at the restaurant..

Food also replaces metonymically all the types of bonds as shakir remarks: "The author has avoided the use of politics and religion as the common ground for her characters due to the reaction that these two subjects evoke when it comes to Arabs and America." (Shakir,1988 : 42). This is also the point made by Bardenstein when he can comment on "emotional bonding session for a group of persons far away from their motherland" (Bardenstein, 2010: 165). Subject positioning, nevertheless, classes her in the ambiguous position of outsider who contracts an inner self belonging. While her customers and other characters in *Crescent* can be described as first generation immigrants, Sirine can not be considered as part of them because she was born and brought up in America.

As mentioned before, Arab immigrants were caught in the different cultural webs of a foreign country and feel the necessity of leaning upon small details of the old home as a way of keeping alive the tradition of their ancestors, but they fall in conflictual identity. In this perspective food becomes a kind of signifier that shows the internal struggles of characters. Cooking Arab foods helps to ensure the cultural survival of Arab-Americans in the United States. It bridges the gap between the different identities and adds structure to the narrative. Diana Abu-Jaber states that:

"Eating is one of the things that crystallizes your experiences and the metaphor of food is a way to translate the cultural experiences. Thus the treatment of food in *Crescent* becomes a 'safe' way for white American readers to listen to dangerous topics like war, Iraq, the Middle East" (PSU Talk, 21 October 2006).

Food, identity and love in the novel play an important role since they allow the characters to meditate their lives. For Sirine, cooking becomes a way of considering and questioning her fears regarding Hanif and her connection to Iraq. The food she cooks brings the professor closer to her. He makes her so uncomfortable in dealing with the sensations he causes in her, but, in the meantime, she feels something enigmatic in relation to him. He seems to have: "some sort of internal light that makes him intriguing and, at

the same time, a little bit hard for her to look directly, he's so charming and educated and worldly" (53). Han wants to teach Sirine about Iraq and the scent of the spices:

"It seems that something potent was unlocked inside her during the night, as they shared sleep without quite touching, his breath fanning her face. The intimate proximity of Han's body comes back to her now, the scent of his skin echoed in the rich powder of spices" (124).

Hanif or Han, as he is called throughout the novel, carries the pain of being an exile. In a certain way, he tries to place himself inside the new environment of the U.S. and, little by little, he reveals details of his life. The novel is interwoven with Hanif's flashbacks of his life in Iraq and his escape from the country during Saddam Hussein's dictatorship. On the one hand, Hanif, needs directions to situate himself in the U.S. He declares to Sirine: "I really don't get the geography of this town." He says, "It seems like things keep swimming around me. I think I know where something is, and then it's gone" (85).

He feels displaced and finds in Sirine and in her dishes his real home. Sirine, meanwhile is interested in learning about her father's culture and religion. As she was not raised immersed in her father's culture she does not understand her connection with the professor and Iraq.

Besides, during their first sex relation, Sirine sensations are also connected to food: "She opens her mouth and tastes his skin and tongue. He is amber and caramel and earth-colored. His skin excites her; she inhales deeply, as if she could take in his essence; he tastes of almond, of sweetness" (126). Making love to him, as it is described, means a new sweet sensation to her, the one she had never felt when cooking; after that she inhales the scent of his arms that, for her, "smell like bread" (127).

3.2 The Representation of womanhood in *Crescent*

Gender is another issue that requires careful examination since they are among the main fields on which the East - West cultural encounter is being staged. The characters in the novel deconstruct common stereotypes of Arab-American women. The focus on their lives shows how distorted their portrayal are in the media and public discourse; it

describes Middle-Eastern women as submissive, quiet, and hidden. However, when Sirine joins the Women in Islam group, we witness welcome contradictions to the stereotypes.

Crescent presents powerful Arab women in the novel, like Rana and Um-Nadia, whose actions and thoughts deconstruct misconceptions about Arab and Muslim women. Um-Nadia for instance owns a café and she is economically independent. She is a charismatic, industrious and successful woman who efficiently runs the café, with the help of her young daughter, Mireille. The novel, then, subverts misrepresentations of Arab women and undermines the monolithic image of them as reliable, submissive and helpless characters. Um-Nadia does not yield to stereotypes of self-perpetuating and women ‘lower self-esteem’. In fact when CIA agents show up at her café following the Second Arab Gulf War between 1991-92, she “chases them off the premises flapping her kitchen towel at them” (p. 9).

Elsewhere, Um-Nadia prevents Sirine to disclose to Han the fact that she had sex with Aziz because Um-Nadia maintains, being an Arab, Han may kill Aziz: “Habeebti, you would not believe in ten million years what people are still like” (p. 262). Um-Nadia is financially independent and efficient in running projects but at the same time she is aware of the fact that no Arab man can accept that behaviour.

Indeed, the variety of roles of women is also enhanced in the book by particular scenes. For example, in her searching for her enlightenment about the culture she knows a little about, Sirine has her first contact with Rana, Hanif’s student, a colorful and powerful presence. Rana takes her to a meeting of the group “Women in Islam” “This meeting reverses popular representations of Arab women in the US as “covered in black from head to toe, [. . .] uneducated, unattractive, and enslaved beings.”(189). In fact, the Arab women that the meeting gathers are portrayed as lively and vigorous. On the one hand, they seek to challenge stereotypes about their Arab American communities. They become politically and socially active members of the larger US community. In this meeting of Arab women, attended by Sirine, the women discuss “whether they’ll participate in a campus sit-in to protest the occupation of the West Bank, whether they’ll donate baked goods to the Lutheran fund-raiser, and whether they’ll appear on a local TV news show to discuss the negative portrayal of Arabs in Hollywood films” (p. 159).

For Rana, the importance of having Sirine attend the meeting lies in the fact that this decision is a sign that she finally feels part of the community and, on the other hand, that she may be helpful to the other young women because she is “such a model to the young women” (187). The diversity of the women assembled is also interesting to Sirine since it clarifies some stereotypes around as it is the case when she realises how diverse the women are, “fully cloaked in veils and floor-length black dress; the rest are dressed in pants and cardigans, jeans and blouses.” (188) Attending the meeting is an opportunity to discover part of her Iraqi identity because she would be closer to her father’s roots. Adding to that, the chef would learn more about Han and “the pieces of things he didn’t seem able to tell her about.” (Ibid).

In relation to the diasporic experience existing, in Nadia’s Café, the ethnic cuisine scented with spices and tasting of home, comforts and inspires the Arab and Iranian expatriates who eat here and live, work and study nearby. The cook allows a respite from longing in a matriarchal place. Indeed, Fadda-Conrey states that “Sirine’s cooking and the act of participating in its consumption, while drawing various characters together, simultaneously, underscores their varied ethnic, national and cultural identities” (199). It is as if the Arab dishes prepared by the chef enter mouths and invade their minds with the memories of the Arab World, family and friends left behind. Indeed, Sirine’s cooking, as well as her presence in the café even encourages the students to confess their solitude and lament of being “invisible” in the American culture as once one of them revealed to her:

“How painful it is to be an immigrant – even if it was what he’d wanted all his life – sometimes especially if it was what he’d wanted all his life. Americans, he would tell her, don’t have time or the space in their lives for the sort of friendship – days of coffee-drinking and talking – that the Arab students craved. For many of them the café was a little flavour of home.”(22)

Sirine’s food acts upon their inner selves and momentarily the painful experience of missing one’s homeland is forgotten. So, her work in the kitchen and her food act as continuous memory conservator.

Besides, Sirine is both an Arab woman who wants her relationship with her lover to end with marriage and an Arab-American Muslim woman behaving as an American woman frequently going to parties and seeking joy and comfort from her relationship with

her boyfriends and lovers. The professor is completely excited about cooking for her, and, curiously, one of the recipe books he uses to accomplish the dishes is the well known and popular American cookbook entitled *The Joy of Cooking* by the act of replacing the ingredients, Hanif is also playing with the possibilities of momentarily becoming “American.” Being in a new environment allows him new possibilities to forge an identity different from the stigmatized Iraqi one.

3.3 Exile in *Crescent*

The Arab American women writers represent a relatively small minority in the United States, they are writing about different diasporic experiences in the U.S. Thus, it is important to discuss the meanings of the term “diaspora” as a theoretical concept, arguing that it gives a critique of discourses of origins. As Avitar Brah⁸ notes, diaspora derives from the Greek— dia (through) and speirein (to scatter). Therefore, the word demonstrates a notion of a center, a position and a home from which dispersion occurs. I use a concept of diaspora here that implies an embeddedness in a relational way of positioning one group against another—a notion that problematizes the dichotomy of self-other or minority-majority. Brah calls this theory of diaspora a “mutli-axial understanding of power” (622), a view that highlights the ways in which a group constituted as a minority by one definition may be construed as a majority by another. In other words, we see minorities not only in relation to the majority but also in relation to one another, and vice versa.

Thus, any attachment of a group at a point along a singular pole becomes questionable. Engraved within this idea of diaspora, the notion of border becomes a political construct. The most relevant in the discussion study of the different works by Arab and Arab American writers and artists is Brah definition of borders as arbitrary dividing lines that are simultaneously social, cultural and psychic; territories to be

⁸ Avtar Brah recently retired as Professor of Sociology at Birkbeck as a specialist in race, gender and ethnic identity issues. She was awarded an MBE in 2001 in recognition of her research. Her books include *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*; *Hybridity and Its Discontents: Politics, Science, Culture* (edited with Annie Coombes); *Thinking Identities: Racism, Ethnicity and Culture* and *Global Futures: Migration, Environment and Globalization* (both edited with Mary Hickman and Mairtin Mac an Ghail).

patrolled against those whom they construct as outsiders, aliens, the Others; forms of demarcation where the very act of prohibition inscribes transgression; zones where fear of the Other is the fear of the self; places where claims to ownership—claims to “mine,” “yours,” and “theirs”—are staked out,

The experience of exile is related to these notions of border crossing and diaspora. Exile may be defined as being forced to leave one’s homeland due to colonization or fear of political persecution. Abu Jabber willingly chooses to live a diasporic existence in search of literary, political or economic freedom, and prosperity.

Some writers discussed exile through their characters (as in *Crescent*). Writing becomes, then, a liberating factor allowing them to revisit their past and history, deconstruct it, and reconstruct their own stories. In most cases, however, these authors and their characters share what Edward Said terms the “perpetual state of the exiled.” They exist in a “median state, neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half-involvements and half detachments, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or a secret outsider on another” (Talaat Abdelrazek, 2007:10).

In *Crescent*, exile is omnipresent since all the characters suffer from either physical or mental dislocation. Hanif suffers for being an exile and for having to deal with the loss of his home as well as of his religion, culture, and identity. Indeed, when he returned back home, Baghdad, after spending five years studying in Cairo, Han feels alienated in his own home:

"I came back from Cairo obsessed with just about everything cultural – literature, painting, drama... I said and did as much as I could to cause my parents as much unhappiness as possible. I was always angry with them – I felt as if I had gone on to a new place in my life while they had remained stubbornly behind. Now I saw our poverty all around us – everything – the dirt floor in our house, the wrapped glass in our windows – all of it offended me. At night the sky flashed with bombs; it was impossible to sleep. I had nightmares of flying in pieces through the air." (281).

Han recognizes that during his absence, “I grew out of the curve of my family and home. Maybe I turned into something different than I was born to be” (220). It was not

easy for him to reintegrate into the life he had left behind because Saddam Hussein took over, and in the following year declared war on Iran. Consequently, all of his aspirations for freedom were suppressed by Saddam Hussein's regime, which led him to start writing against it in an underground newspaper under the pseudonym of Ma'al. When the security police learnt about these dissident writings, they assaulted his parents' house looking for him. They arrested his twelve-year-old brother who identified himself as Ma'al in order to cover for him. Later, his sister got arrested as well and then killed. Hanif ended up escaping to England.

Thus, he tries to forget his past, when he had to flee Iraq during the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, and more intimately, to forget his experience marked by the feeling of guilt about what happened to his family because of him. More importantly for Hanif, home is lost and has become a mythic space and a place of no return.

In an interview with Andrea Shalal-Esa, when asked about the character Hanif, she explained that the character is part of one of her "literary obsessions," which questions the painful experience of being in a dislocated condition. This diasporic experience is related to the very moment that a person involuntary leaves his or her country and is unsure about the future, an experience that she describes as an "incredible experience and journey . . . and for a lot of people it can be a real process of loss" (5) for many people. Hanif is rather secretive about his past and behaves in a way as if trying to erase his traumatic past experiences out from his mind. His images of Iraq are painful as he is haunted by the experience of having been forced to leave his country as an exile. Hanif's drama is an individual one presented through the story, but it becomes typical of other Iraqis and their emigration from Saddam Hussein's dictatorship. Little by little, the professor reveals to Sirine his past, as the following passage demonstrates:

"He's my younger brother", Han says slowly. "His name is Arif. I haven't seen him – or my parents, for that matter– in over twenty years.[...] I escaped to England not long after Saddam Hussein came to power [...].He's almost ten years younger –and he got the idea that I was some sort of daring revolutionary gone into exile. I wanted him to leave the country when he still had the chance, but he refused to go. He said he had his work," Han says, rolling his eyes. "He was arrested and imprisoned before his thirteenth birthday. That was twenty-one years ago. And I can't return to help him." (133)

Han's situation as an exile is permeated with bitterness and feeling of guilt for being responsible for his brother's arrest after his escape. Due to these circumstances, Han tells Sirine that there is absolutely no possibility of returning to Iraq since he knows what happens to other political exiles: "Saddam's idea of mercy was of allowing them to apologize for escaping before having them executed" (134). For him, finding his brother alive would ease the burden of responsibility and soothe the feeling of loss he carries. As the narrator describes at the end of the chapter:

"Han ticks back his head – the sad, Arab gesture. The one her uncle has taught her means something like, aren't you listening? His expression seems a sort of surrender: the loss of a thing that he has already lost before. He looks away." (134)

Accordingly, Han's memories and the feeling of a double loss of home and family determine the way he acts, allowing his past to shape his present to an extent he cannot control. In a certain way, his memories are strongly tied to political facts in Iraq; he tries to forget about his flight from Iraq, in 1980, when Saddam Hussein had declared war on Iran. This took place in an unstable political situation when the new party – the Ba'athist Party – was trying to control all aspects of lives – from media to the arts to the schools – and Han's father was afraid of what could happen to his elder son so he sent him away to study in private school in Cairo where he learned the history of the West – American and British and when he went from home for the first time. His experience as a refugee outlined his new way of living he went to a private school in Cairo. He describes this process of assimilation he underwent as something he could not prevent: "The school had British and American faculty, classes were conducted in English, and history classes were the history of the west, literature was the literature of America and Britain. I didn't question any of it" (259).

In this context of experience of exile, *Crescent* goes beyond a romanticized story to show how different experiences of Arabs in the West are influenced by a similar nostalgia for homeland and the difficulty in belonging to the host land, as Hanif's condition indicates. On the other hand, for Nathan Green, an eccentric American photographer who tries to fashion an identity for himself by trying to appropriate the culture of the other country, uses photography, since photography has always seemed very much about seizing things, to keep in touch with memories that are tied up back with Iraq where he meets Hanif's sister Leila and falls in love with her without Han's knowledge. Their love story

ends in tragedy and Nathan lives in regret for the rest of his life and blames himself for Leila's death.

Despite being American, Nathan has more affinities with the East than with the West. Because of this, he is aware of the political situation of that region; he knows the geographies of the places he has been to, he knows the names of the Arab poets and their poetry by heart. Moreover, the photographer feeds an insistent desire to photograph people – mainly Sirine and Hanif – in their moments of intimacy. It is in the back kitchen of Nadia's Café, watching Sirine stuff some grape leaves, that Nathan reveals his story.

Abu-Jaber's story gives new and important details about the life of Arabian immigrants in the United States. The author makes the readers compassionate to her characters. The readers get an opportunity to see the life of immigrants in the U.S. and to penetrate their hard memories. He underlines origins and personalities of the main characters. As the author speaks about Hanif:

“Sirine watches Han and for a moment it seems that she can actually see the ancient traces in Han's face, the quality of his gaze that seems to originate from a thousand-thousand years of watching the horizon – a forlorn, beautiful gazing, rich and more seductive than anything she has ever seen” (48).

When Sirine gets closer with Han, she knows more about the life of Iraqi people. She discovers that his sister has disappeared and his brother is imprisoned. Accordingly, immigrants have their own past, their feelings and problems. After the 9/11 events, people regard Arab immigrants as potential terrorists. Abu-Jaber wants to break this stereotype and clarify how regime can hurt peaceful public and how they also suffer from unfair attitude of the government in their motherland. Besides, once they come to America in the search for the better life, they meet prejudices and unfair attitude. Despite the novel describes sad events, it makes light impression and gives hope for better. Accordingly, one can say that Diana Abu Jaber has succeeded in giving her readers close image about true life of Arabian descents in Los Angeles. The information presented in the book is different from the typical ideas about the Arabian immigrants in the U.S. From the one side Abu-Jaber describes atrocities and hardships immigrants experienced in their motherlands. She shows that Lebanese, Iraqi and Jordanian immigrants have painful memories about the horror and mistreatment of people in their homelands. Painful memories haunt these people and they try to erase them from their memory in their new motherland. At the same time, and despite they all had to pass through many hardships, they still love and

appreciate their native countries and keep memories full of affections and fondness. Immigrants know that social and economic problems in their countries will not let them regress home, so they keep thinking about their home with sadness and nostalgia. This feeling of homesickness is an aspect which is frequently discussed and portrayed in literature about immigrants. For instance in the novel, *Nadia's Café* turns to be a meaningful space as it is filled with the smell of dishes cooked by Sirine, which is able to cheer the Arab students up; besides, her act of preparing the food, especially baklava, is also a strong link to the "old world" since it reminds Hanif of his family and his life in Iraq. Moreover, her food works as bridge drawing closer the regular customers while they enjoy the afternoon conversations in the café. In this way, the café with all its rooms, take on the role of a site of memory; a reconstruction of the past based on experiences of the present and through the relationships the individual has with the places he is inserted in. The act of eating the Arab food and the presence of the characters in the café form a sort of "ritual." Curiously, food serves to feed the characters involved in the story, as well as to "feed" and provoke past memories. Consequently, it becomes not only a piece of the old home but also help them adapt to the changes in the way of the new life and face great cultural clash.

CONCLUSION

Diana Abu-Jaber has shown in her novels *Arabian Jazz* and *Crescent* the possibility of treating the ethnic past innovatively. Instead of glorifying it, she has chosen to represent the ethnic complexity of her characters in their ambivalent situations. Instead of focusing on the universal theme of a clash of cultures, Abu-Jaber leaves space for individuality in her characters. Abu-Jaber has placed Arab American ethnicity in the tradition of ethnic literature in America that adds texture to the literary representations of American society.

In *Arabian Jazz*, Abu-Jaber succeeded in re-establishing the relations between the characters and their past. In fact, she represents the characters as alienated from their American environment to place them in their native culture but refuses to resolve completely the differences between the two cultures. In analyzing the main characters of the novel Fatima, Matussem, Melvina and Jemorah, we can see that all of them as well as their views on homeland and host land could be taken as representatives of changes in the idea of diaspora and home. Indeed, Fatima characterizes the classic diaspora: she sees the United States as a momentary home and intensely desire for the day she will be able to return to Jordan, after her nieces get married to Arab men. Her diasporic experience is seen as classic because it happened with pain, loss and struggle. She was haunted by the loss of her sisters, her parent's home and her responsibility to take care of her younger brother Matussem and her nieces Jemorah and Melvina. Matussem can be seen as an example of those who migrated for economic purpose and for seeking a better life. He accepted Euclid as his home because of his relationship with his wife Nora, which has impacted his life in such a way that for him to leave Euclid would mean to leave the home he created with his dead wife. Melvina, on the other hand, represents contemporary diasporians who understand their condition as hyphenated and know that the connection to the home land is nearly absent nowadays. She seems to have a clear idea of the differences between her family and the others, and embraces the idea that today we can all possibly become immigrants, or know someone who has immigrated somewhere. Jemorah is the representative of the second generation of immigrants and lives in conflict with herself. Like many sons and daughters of immigrants, she is torn between her Arab and her American self. Jemorah also feels displaced in her host-country and dreams about the land

of her father. However, this home is imaginary and retuning to it is very difficult. This is why Nassir, the cousin, convinces her not to move to Jordan: he understands that her conflict involved not only her Arabness in America, but also her mother's death in Jordan. Jemorah wanted to live where her mother died and where her father's family lived. Jemorah's conflict affected her life profoundly; she had no control over her life and refused to make her own decision. Through the conversation with Nassir and Melvina, Jemorah reaches a satisfactory understanding of her ethnic identity and finds that painful experiences would happen to her no matter where she lived and that this tie to the home land is something difficult to find. The only thing she realizes about her family is that they were all immigrants who moved from Nazareth to Jordan. For Jemorah, reality does not appear, it is only by further investigation and personal experimentation that it does.

In *Crescent*, imagining Arab community through the existence of food becomes an original way to structure the narrative. This problem is linked to the desire for Arabness as the need of Arab-Americans. Working on the belief of cultural integration, Abu Jabber, uses the café as the strongest metaphor for assimilation. The good mix of ethnicities in the café becomes an effective elaboration to support the values proposed ; equality and equity for everyone must be tightly maintained.

As said before, the human landscape presented in the book is different from the general ideas about the Arabian immigrants in the U.S. Abu-Jaber shows that Lebanese, Iraqi and Jordanian immigrants have kept painful memories about people in their homelands which haunt them and which consequently they try to forget in their new motherland. Immigrants and exiled people know that social, political and economic problems in their countries will prevent them from returning home, so they keep it in mind and dream about it. This feeling of homesickness is an aspect which is frequently discussed and portrayed in literature about immigrants. For instance in the novel Arab immigrants identify with the atmosphere of Nadia's Café which turns to be an important space as it is filled with the smell of dishes cooked by Sirine. These flavors seem to soften the feeling of loss of their homelands and bring joy to them; besides, her act of preparing the food, especially baklava, is also a strong link to the "old world" since it reminds Hanif of his family and his life in Iraq. The food then becomes a bridge that brings the regular customers closer to each other. In this way, the café with all its many rooms, takes the role of a site of memory; a reconstruction of the past based on experiences of the present and through the relationships the individual has with the places he is inserted in. Food serves

to feed the characters involved in the story, as well as to “feed” and awake past memories. Consequently, it becomes not only a piece of the old home but also help them adapt to the changes of the new life.

To conclude, Diana Abu Jabber, by elaborating complex perceptions of ethnicity, migration, exile and feelings of cultural exclusion, provides us with narratives that move our conscience and sense of responsibility. She has succeeded in shedding light on cultural questions in the Arab culture such as identity, gender, in-betweens and love which other disciplines have explored. The two novels show us that, although the diasporic experience is a universal phenomenon, it is also very unique to each immigrant. Some may say that today Diaspora has become easier to accept because of the advances of technology. However, most of people, be they migrants or exiled, have inside him this feeling of loss. Every human being wants to be seen as an equal; all of us want to belong with something or someone else. Abu Jabbers’ books foreground how strong this longing can be.

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Diana Abu-Jabers nostalgic receipts

Baklava



*Syrup

2 cups sugar
1 cup water
Splash of lemon juice
1 teaspoon orange blossom water
1 pound walnuts
1 cup sugar
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1-pound butter clarified (melted and
with the top layer skimmed off)
1 box phyllo dough, defrosted

In a saucepan, boil all the syrup ingredients until the mixture turns clear. Cover the syrup and set aside in the refrigerator to cool.

In a food processor, grind together the walnuts, sugar, and cinnamon to a fine, sandy consistency. Set aside.

Preheat the oven 300 degrees.

Carefully unfold the phyllo dough, making sure not to crack or tear it. Keep it covered with a piece of waxed paper to help prevent it from drying out.

Butter the bottom of a shallow baking pan. You can also use a cookie sheet that has at least an inch-high lip. Carefully unpeel the first sheet of phyllo and lay it flat and smooth in the bottom of the pan. Brush with clarified butter. Continue layering sheets of phyllo dough brushing each sheet with butter until you've used half the dough.

Spread the nuts-and-sugar mixture over the dough.

Place another sheet of dough on the mixture and butter it. Continue layering and buttering dough until you've used up the rest.

Using sharp knife, carefully cut through the baklava in long, straight lines to form diamonds or squares (about 2 inches long).

Bake for about 50 minutes or until golden brown. Pour the cooled over the hot

baklava. Eat when ready!

Tabbouleh



For when everything is falling apart and there's no time to cook.

1 cup cracked wheat (bulgur, fine-grain) 3 medium tomatoes chopped
2 small bunches flat-leaf parsley, minced 2 tablespoons olive oil
2 medium cucumbers, peeled and chopped juice of 1 small lemon
Salt and freshly ground pepper

Wash the bulgur and let it soak in water to cover for ½ hour. Drain thoroughly and add the vegetables. Add the oil, lemon, and salt and pepper to taste. Mix well. Cover, and let the tabbouleh marinate in the refrigerator for a couple of hours.

Make 6 to 8 servings

Diana Abu-Jaber – *The Language of Baklava* (143).

